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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the integration of Business Russian into the Russian curriculum at Michigan State University (MSU) and the creation of a capstone sequence of Business Russian courses at the advanced level. The establishment of the basic goals of the school's business language instruction and the needs of the students are discussed. The paper also examines how the program was introduced into each lesson of first-year Russian courses and the responses to a survey of MSU business language student attitudes concerning the course. Each year of the Russian course is detailed in terms of how the program is integrated into them, including the development of cross-cultural sensitivity, the use of case reviews and advertisements of products, videos and television presentations, and the use of authentic materials. Additionally, ways are discussed of improving cultural awareness and sensitivity that help reduce stereotyping. Finally, methods used in advanced courses are described. It is noted that the course described in this paper permits the creation of a Business Russian course on the advanced level which will examine topics in the areas of Russian business and economics in a relatively sophisticated manner without having to compensate for inadequate linguistic and cultural preparation on the part of students. (23 reference notes) (GLR)

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Stressing the importance of language study for American business interests has become a required introductory topos for studies advocating courses in business language.[1] Various august, authoritative bodies such as the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies (1979) and the National Committee on Excellence in Education (1983), are cited along with prominent spokespersons, like Illinois Senator Paul Simon, as witnesses of the neglect of foreign language education in our schools and universities and the resultant deterioration of our role as the world's major economic power.[2] Although the business community has traditionally relegated foreign language skills to a position of secondary importance, foreign language departments have increasingly shed their exclusive relationship with literature and have introduced new courses dedicated to business language.[3] In many cases, these courses represent a partnership with business-school faculty and there is reason to hope that in the future, American corporations will come to place considerable emphasis on foreign language proficiency and cross-cultural competency.[4]

Many French, Spanish and German departments, in particular, now have well established third-year sequences in business or commercial language and have, in some cases, developed specialized courses dealing with specific professions such as hotel and restaurant management or the health

industry. When we turn our attention to Russian, however, the situation becomes considerably less favorable. In general, non-Western European languages have been neglected in the education of students preparing themselves for careers in international business and trade, and Russian, for largely ideological reasons, has been particularly ignored.[5] The recent break-up of the Soviet Union, however, radically changed the future outlook and requires considerable scrambling on our part, as Russian teachers, in order to fill the void. The development of fledgling democratic, free-market oriented governments in Russia and in other former Soviet republics gives some promise of a considerable market for American goods in the future. Many prominent national and international figures such as Mikhail Gorbachev and Librarian of Congress James Billington have urged in the press that we abandon old ways of thinking and take an active role in the development of a new Russian state and economy.[6] Very recently, former President Nixon advocated the creation of a free enterprise corps that would send thousands of Western managers to Russia to educate newly formed enterprises in the ways of the free-market system.[7] Whether or not any of these grand plans is eventually adopted, recent personal experience tells us that the situation is rapidly changing. Never before have so many of our majors been offered the employment opportunities both here and in Russia that are now available. The former Soviet Union has long been identified as a difficult place to do business in English and the growing opportunities for small and medium-size firms make the demand for Russian speakers even greater, since, lacking the resources of large corporations, smaller companies are

more likely to be sensitive to the need for foreign language proficiency.[7]

Despite the fact that I earlier referred to our need to scramble, I would stress that we, as teachers of Russian, must not rush to patch together Business Russian courses which are simply grafted on to the present curriculum and are intended to achieve the traditional goals of business-related vocabulary acquisition and mastery of the forms of business correspondence. As Wilga Rivers writes, curriculum changes derive, in most cases, from outside factors, including political upheavals and resultant changes in career opportunities.[8] The cataclysmic changes in the former Soviet Union must be viewed as a chance for us to rethink our curriculum and respond to the needs and desires of our students. In the present paper I suggest that we should not simply add a Business Russian course at the third-year level, although such a course should serve as a capstone, but should carefully reconsider our entire program and explore innovative means by which business-related materials might be integrated into it.

At Michigan State University the success of the Business German courses has inspired those of us in other languages to begin our own programs. Building on the close relationship between the Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) and Business German, we have received funding from the Center to develop means of integrating Business Russian into our curriculum and to create a capstone sequence of Business Russian courses at the advanced level. As part of our initial curriculum review and needs assessment, we distributed questionnaires to all our undergraduate Russian students which identified

their career aspirations, interest in taking a Business Russian course and willingness to have business-related materials integrated into all levels of Russian, including first year. We were somewhat surprised to find that seventy percent of our students intended to use their Russian language skills in a business-related career. Sixty-five percent were interested in taking a Business Russian course at the third or fourth-year level. Seventy-six percent wanted to have business-related materials integrated into other courses in the Russian program and fifty percent approved the introduction of some Business Russian content to first-year courses. Encouraged by these results we began exploring means of integrating new materials, techniques and approaches that would improve our entire program and make the advanced Business Russian course an integral part of it, rather than a weak appendage with no relationship to what came before.

It is important that we distinguish from the outset between the rather simple integration of business-related materials into our program and the much more complex process of evaluating the total direction of our approach and methodology and shaping it in such a way as to not only meet the business-related needs of our students, but to satisfy other curricular goals as well. In the past, language departments have had close ties with literature and literature courses remain in most Russian curricula. Other directions, including Business Russian, Political Russian and International Studies, however, should begin to play a role in our curriculum planning with general provisions made to each which, though beneficial, will not depart too far from the needs and objectives of indi-

vidual students.[9]

The first step in the integration of Business Russian into our program was to determine the basic goals of our business language instruction and the needs of the students. Studies which were designed to assess the needs of U.S. corporations or attitudes of business school faculty proved very useful in this regard. Although more studies are needed in order to determine language specific skills which Russian students should acquire, a number of published reports reach the consensus that U. S. corporations particularly value comprehending and communicating skills, as well as cross-cultural understanding.[10] Skills traditionally associated with business language courses such as learning technical vocabulary and composing business letters are low on the list of priorities compiled by Miami-area business faculty in a study conducted by Christine Uber Grosse.[11] Wilga Rivers is correct when she states that specialized vocabulary can always be found in dictionaries and is subject to change, while business letters can be generated by word-processors.[12] Indeed, a 1986 article by John Grandin on using computers to teach business correspondence skills stresses the modular nature of such letters and maintains that standard phraseology can be stored in a word processor to be called forth as needed.[13]

Our job is made easier by the fact that conversation and comprehension skills are not required exclusively by Business Russian students, but will serve all our students well, regardless of their career objectives. On a general level, therefore, beginning at the first-year we will assist our students with business objectives by adopting an approach which stresses

communicative competence and active use of language. At Michigan State we have introduced into each lesson of first-year Russian, communicative activities which require extensive role-playing. As long as it is kept at a basic level, simulations of situations that might occur professionally may also be introduced. In first year Russian courses we should follow the principle promoted by T. Bruce Fryer for business-content units in secondary classsrooms and simulate situations of a more general nature in which students can identify the commercial value of their language experience, but which do not require the mastery of a heavily technical new vocabulary.[14] Indeed, one of the major reasons many of the student-respondents in our MSU business language survey registered a reluctance to have business content integrated into first-year Russian was a fear that masses of business-related vocabulary would distract them from acquiring basic skills, which is the prime purpose of the introductory course. Communicative activities based on real-life situations such as exchanging currency, basic banking, transportation, travel, employment and housing are useful for all Russian students no matter what their career objectives, but will also give business-oriented students a sense of acquiring useful skills which will eventually be expanded and enhanced by an advanced level Business Russian course. Thus, in the first year, business content and vocabulary are presented through communicative activities tied to each unit rather than specialized vocabulary lists which will be quickly forgotten.[15]

The first-year experience for students interested in business can also be enhanced by using video and television presentations. Cross-cultural infor-

mation may be taught effectively by showing videos of television advertisements. Particularly useful are advertisements of products familiar to the students. Volvo automobiles, for example were advertised on Russian television within the last year in a manner which, though similar to Volvo advertising in America (safety was stressed), also contained differences which may be used to begin a discussion concerning cultural differences. Short advertisements may be used in first year providing that they are adequately previewed and that the students are guided as to what they should watch for by questionnaire-handouts. In addition, weather broadcasts, which are quite easy to comprehend since much of the information is printed on the screen, can be used to provide a very basic lesson in economic geography. This may also be done by using brief reports which identify the main products or resources of cities and regions.

Cross-cultural sensitivity may also be increased by showing English language videos such as the recent Frontline program created by Hedrick Smith. The main thrust of this report is the fate of former Communist enterprises in the developing free enterprise system, with particular attention paid to "Uralmash," the giant machine tools plant located in Yekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk). Programs such as this have interest for all students, but can have particular benefit to business majors.

Second-year Russian is generally viewed as a year of review in which the basic concepts are reiterated and treated in greater depth. In our new curriculum, case review will be accompanied by extensive exercises which emphasize communicative use of language. Communicative activities are stressed and these should include topics from professional life. Once again,

as in first year, the unit should determine the vocabulary rather than the other way around. It is certainly proper that business- related units be taught, including buying, selling. currency transactions, retail, as well as political and technical terms.

In both first and second-years it is essential that we utilize authentic texts. Relatively new supplementary texts, such as Emily Urevich and Irene Thompson's *Reading Real Russian,* offer students the opportunity to encounter real texts and encourage them to develop reading strategies similar to those they employ when reading English.[16] The exercises encourage students to utilize items provided in the text such as cognates, context, situation, categories, etc. The text itself contains units which are useful for students with business-related objectives such as transport, housing, and retailing. In addition, supplemental units should be created dealing with banking, advertising, agriculture, industry and other business related topics, which will also be beneficial for the general student.

Video materials should continue to be used in second as in first year. Once again, they must be adequately previewed and students should be instructed in obtaining the gist of the message rather than a literal and complete translation. It is essential that the segments be short and that they conform to a format which is introduced to the student and will, one hopes, eventually become familiar and readily recognizable. Accomplishing this will very likely require editing of the video material. In our program we have created news programs which follow the same format as the evening news, but are much shorter and contain only familiar material.

The use of authentic materials also makes it easier to develop cultural

awareness in the students. As Patricia Paulsell noted in an article published in 1987, business foreign language instruction in the U.S. has neglected the need to develop in students a sensitivity to the cultural features which lie behind the differences in economic systems and business practice.[17] Certainly one can only endorse Paulsell's suggestion that each thematic unit covered in the business language course be accompanied by a sophisticated crosscultural component, but these components will be more effective and can be better developed if students have already had considerable crosscultural sensitivity training in the first two years of language study and in the English-language culture and civilization courses which are a part of many undergraduate Russian programs. Such training will, of course, benefit all students and should be a major component in foreign language classrooms.

A considerable number of cultural grids have been developed by researchers in an attempt to expand our notions of culture beyond an emphasis on the monuments of civilization to include a more anthropological approach which examines beliefs, behavior and values.[18] This focus is essential if we want to increase the cultural sensitivity and awareness of students to a level that will prove beneficial in an advanced Business Russian course. In first and second-year language courses we need to develop a variety of techniques that include speaking, writing and reading skills.[19] It seems to me that, at this level, the main emphasis should be on hypothesis refinement and decreasing stereotypic perceptions.[20] Slides, videos, ads, or stories are given to the students and they are encouraged to make observations about them. Additional infor-

mation is presented and the students are then asked to revise their original observations. Depending on the complexity of the language, English or Russian may be used. *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* almost daily have stories about the difficulties associated with doing business in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Almost all these stories are based on cultural misunderstandings. Once students have begun to gain some sensitivity to the target culture, they should be encouraged to analyze these business problems as case studies, and come up with solutions.[21] One useful activity for decreasing stereotypic perceptions which can be used on the intermediate level is reading materials provided to Russian-speaking immigrants in order to help them adapt to life in the U.S. These materials often contain many stereotypes about Americans which are readily apparent to natives. Once stereotyping patterns have been established, the students should read materials written for Americans about Russia and be encouraged to find similar patterns. Also useful in this regard are visits from native Russian speakers who have recently come to this country. Students should ask them about their experiences with stereotypes that Americans have about Russians and then the students should question the native informants concerning their own attitudes towards Americans. At Michigan State, in the Lansing, Michigan area, we are fortunate to have a growing community of Russian speaking refugees from Baku, Azerbaijan who are happy to visit classes and share their observations with students.

When we turn to advanced courses, and by this I mean third year and beyond, we would want, of course to continue our communicative approach

and emphasize simulated situations, including professional situations, video, authentic texts and extensive role-playing. Despite the fact that there is not a single up-to-date proficiency-oriented text for Business Russian, there are some recent advanced texts such as *Focus on Russian* by Sandra Rosengrant and Elena Lifschitz and *Russian: Stage Three* by Lekich, Efremova and Rassudova, which provide the kind of interactive instruction in speaking and writing which would effectively complement a business Russian course.[22] Although Russian sections and departments are generally limited in the number of language for special purposes classes they can offer, courses in political Russian designed to utilize Natasha Simes's and Richard Robin's new text, *Political Russian: An Intermediate Course in Russian Language for International Relations, National Security and Socio-Economics,* though quite different from the sort of Business Russian course I would prefer, can serve as beneficial complements to such a course particularly in the area of vocabulary acquisition.[23]

The main advantage of integrative curriculum planning of the type I have described above is that it will permit the creation of a Business Russian course on the advanced level which will examine topics in the areas of Russian business and economics in a relatively sophisticated manner without having to compensate for inadequate linguistic and cultural preparation on the part of students. A proficiency based language program which emphasizes both oral and written skills and includes carefully integrated business Russian materials will greatly improve our chances of producing functionally proficient students in a Business Russian course on the advanced level.

NOTES

[1] A useful summary and bibliography is provided by Juergen K. Hoegl, "Education in the World System: The Demand for Language and International Proficiencies in Economic Development and National Security," *Foreign Language Annals*, 19 (1986), pp. 281-87.

[2] Hoegl, p. 282.

[3] The assessment of the attitudes of American corporations used here is based on a survey by Carol S. Fixman which was reported in her article,"The Foreign Needs of U.S.-Based Corporations," *Foreign Languages and the Workplace*, ed. Richard D. Lambert & Sarah Jane Moore. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 511 (September, 1990), pp. 25-46.

[4] Marianne Inman, "Language and Cross-Cultural Training in American Multinational Corporations," *Modern Language Journal*, 69 (1985), p. 254.

[5] Richard D. Lambert, "Foreign Language Use Among International Business Graduates," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 511, (September 1990), p. 51.

[6] Mikhail S. Gorbachev, "No Time for Stereotypes," *New York Times*, 24 Feb. 1992, p. A13; James Billington, "Feed Russia's Pride, Not Just Its Stomach," *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 Feb, 1992, p. A14.

[7] Richard M. Nixon, "The Challenge We Face in Russia," *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 Mar. 1992, p. A14.

[8] Wilga M. Rivers, "Curriculum, Student Objectives, and the Training of Foreign Language Teachers," *Babel,* (October, 1988) 23 #2, p. 5.

[9] Rivers, p. 5.

[10] See Helmut A. Merklein, "Multinational Corporate Perceptions of an International MBA Degree," *ADFL Bulletin,* 6, IV (1975), pp. 33-35; Patricia Cholakian, "Commercial French: An Opporunity for Innovative Classroom Techniques," *French Review,* 54 (1981), pp. 666-671.

[11] Christine Uber Grosse, "Attitudes Toward Language for Business at Two South Florida Universities," *Foreign Language Annals,* 16 (1983), pp. 449-53.

[12] Rivers, p. 6.

[13] John Grandine, "Teaching German Business Correspondence: A Computer-Assisted Approach," *Unterrichtspraxis* 19, ii (1986), p. 52.

[14] T. Bruce Fryer, "Proficiency Guided Business Units in High School Foreign Language Classes," *Perspectives on Proficiency: Curriculum and Instruction*, ed. T. Bruce Fryer (Columbia, SC: SCOLT, 1986): 102.

[15] Fryer, p. 104.

[16] Irene Thompson and Emily Urevich, *Reading Real Russian* Book I, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991).

[17] Patricia R. Paulsell, "Establishing a Cross-Cultural Analysis Component in Business Foreign Language Courses," *ADFL Bulletin,* 18 No. 2 (Jan. 1987), p. 38.

[18] Paulsell discusses a grid developed by Edward T. Hall, an anthropologist, pp. 40-44. Other approaches by several different investigators are presented in Alice Omaggio's *Teaching Language in Context*, (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1986), pp. 363-373.

[19] Omaggio, p. 374.

[20] Omaggio, pp. 392-393.

[21] A recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* describes a disagreement between an American art dealer and a Russian gallery owner concerning the manner in which exhibitions of contemporary paintings by Russian artists were to be displayed in Los Angeles. The Russians found small trendy galleries with exposed-beam ceilings in turn-of-the-century brick buildings to be inappropriate for their paintings. They preferred large airy rooms reminiscent of galleries in the Hermitage. *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 24, 1992, p. B2.

[22] Sandra F. Rosengrant and Elena D. Lifschitz, *Focus on Russian: An Interactive Approach to Writing and Speaking* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1991); *Russian: Stage Three* (Dubuque IA: Kendall/Hunt ACTR, 1991).

[23] Natasha Simes and Richard M. Robin, *Political Russian: An Intermediate Course in Russian Language for International Relations, National Security and Socio-Economics* (Washington, D.C.: ACTR, 1990).